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RECEIVES LETTER *from her* SOLDIER LOVER KILLED in VIRGINIA 46 YEARS AGO

A Tiny Package From the Dead Letter Office
in Washington Discloses a Romance
of the Civil War

"THE letter that never came" has, since the very beginning of literature, been the subject of song and story. More pathetic ballads have been written on it than on all your old oaken buckets, empty chairs, and old apple trees put together. In heart interest it is second only to home and mother, and little prattling Goldenhairs. To story writers, it is more useful than any two other inanimate objects. They owe more to it even than they do to the lost will. They have worked it so mercilessly, however, that the public is a bit skeptical—as skeptical as one's personal friends when one says, "Why, didn't you get my letter? Well, if that isn't the strangest thing."

The dear public, like one's own friends, has ceased to believe in the letter that never came. It smiles and says, "Well, Uncle Sam is pretty reliable. The letter that never came is the letter that never was sent." Which may be true in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand. But there is always the thousandth case, as was recently emphasized up in the little town of Stoughton, Mass., when a young girl received a letter mailed more than a quarter of a century before she was born, and a white-haired old man was made glad by a message from a beloved son who laid down his life for his country during the Richmond campaign more than forty years ago, and a middle-aged wife and mother smiled tenderly over long-forgotten memories of a "boy and girl affair" when she was the girl and a gallant young soldier who went off to the war and never came back was the boy in the case.

Forty-six years that letter was coming! Which may not be "never," but certainly is "a long day."

Forty-six years ago in the troubled days just preceding the firing on Sumter, Massena Ballou Hawes, a high-minded, ambitious lad of twenty-one, was teaching school in Houghton, his home village, and preparing himself to enter college. Within a year he lay dead on a Virginia battlefield. During the summer of 1860, the young school teacher wrote an essay on "What Constitutes True Bravery," and contributed it to a Randolph, Mass., paper. A few months later showing himself a man of deeds as well as words, he enlisted and went to the war, and stood the supreme test as to what constitutes true bravery.

On October 23, 1860, just before going to the front, he wrote a letter to "My very dear Cousin Kate," between the lines of which one may read how "very dear" Cousin Kate was to the high-minded young soldier student about starting on the campaign from which he never returned. But though he knew on paper, and in his own person, what constitutes true bravery, he could not at the time screw up his courage to mail that letter to his very dear Cousin Kate. It was only when he was soldiering in Virginia that he finally addressed it, and a copy of the Randolph paper containing his essay to Miss Kate Hawes, then a pretty school teacher, now Mrs. Kate Crawbaugh, a white-haired old lady living in Cleveland, Ohio.

After lying in the dead letter office at Washington for over forty-five years that letter has just been delivered to Ellisha Hawes, of North Stoughton, the ninety-two-year-old father of the dead soldier, and will eventually reach the person for whom it was originally intended. How it came to remain so long in the dead letter office without being destroyed or returned to the writer, or why it was sent to the dead letter office in the first place, cannot be explained.

It is thought that some clerk there came across the letter, mislaid in some dusty niche until now, and thought he was returning it to the original sender, as the address given was Stoughton, Mass.

It is Miss Bertha Hawes, niece of the writer of it, who finally received and opened this quaint old-fashioned letter from a soldier lad of the civil war to a boyhood sweetheart. She is the granddaughter of the white-haired old man who has

been made happy by this veritable message from the dead, a message whose non-delivery may have been the undoing of a youthful romance.

Miss Hawes was surprised a few weeks ago to receive in her mail a bulky package addressed to Mrs. B. Hawes. She was about to send it back unopened, but on second thought opened it and was amazed to find within the copy of the Randolph newspaper dated 1860 containing the essay on "What Constitutes True Bravery," by, and a letter from, Massena Ballou Hawes, an uncle whom she had never seen, but the story of whose death during the Richmond campaign in Vir-

ginia, when he was barely twenty-two, she had known from childhood.

Both letter and paper were signed M. B. Hawes in old-fashioned script that made the signature look like "Mrs. B. Hawes." As they were dated from Stoughton, Mass., the Dead Letter Office clerk who found them undoubtedly thought he was returning them to the original sender. And Miss Bertha Hawes, concluding that Mrs. B. Hawes might mean her, opened it.

To the feeble white-haired father of "M. B. Hawes" this letter itself is of more value than any inclos-

ure of whose importance the regulation would take cognizance could possibly be. Just how it will appeal to "My very dear Cousin Kate" when she gets it no one can say. It is easy to read between the lines of the essay with its high ideals and the letter with its quaint and curtly phrases of endearment, the romantic story of a high-minded lad just preparing for college, wounded because he did not hear from his beloved "Kate," and bravely offering his life for his country, dying perhaps with her name upon his lips and the thought Mr. Hawes holds the letter in his hands, gazing at it reverently, and letter to stir tender memories even again and again requests that it be read to him.

And to the feeble old grandfather it is dear beyond price. "It comes," he says, "like a message from the dead to comfort me in my old age. He was only in the war six months when I lost him and it has been my greatest grief that I had no last message from him. Now I can die happy, for it is as if he had come back to talk to me and in some way makes me so sure that I shall see him again soon."

Though his eyesight is failing, Mr. Hawes holds the letter in his hands, gazing at it reverently, and letter to stir tender memories even again and again requests that it be read to him.



THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER FROM A WAR TIME PHOTO

MRS. LUCY CRAWBAUGH TO WHOM THE LETTER WAS ADDRESSED

MISS BERTHA HAWES NIECE OF THE DEAD SOLDIER WHO RECEIVED THE LETTER

MR. ELLISHA HAWES FATHER OF THE MAN WHO WROTE THE LETTER